Living Communities and their Archaeologies: Northern European cases : An Introduction to a Themed Section

Thomas, Suzie

2020-11-25

Thomas , S , Lorenzon , M & Bonnie , R 2020 , ' Living Communities and their Archaeologies: Northern European cases : An Introduction to a Themed Section ' , Fennoscandia Archaeologica , vol. XXXVII , pp. 143-146 .

http://hdl.handle.net/10138/330385

publishedVersion

Suzie Thomas, Marta Lorenzon & Rick Bonnie

LIVING COMMUNITIES AND THEIR ARCHAEOLOGIES: NORTHERN EUROPEAN CASES

AN INTRODUCTION TO A THEMED SECTION

Suzie Thomas, Centre of Excellence in Ancient Near Eastern Empires, University of Helsinki: suzie.e.thomas@helsinki.fi; Marta Lorenzon, Centre of Excellence in Ancient Near Eastern Empires, University of Helsinki: marta.lorenzon@helsinki.fi; Rick Bonnie, Centre of Excellence in Ancient Near Eastern Empires, University of Helsinki, Fabianinkatu 24 (P.O. Box 4), 00014 Helsinki, Finland: rick.bonnie@helsinki.fi.

In September 2019, the Centre of Excellence in Ancient Near Eastern Empires (www.helsinki.fi/anee) organized a conference entitled 'Living Communities and Their Archaeologies' (www.helsinki.fi/en/conferences/living-communities-and-their-archaeologies). The conference consisted of presentations that addressed the fundamental issue of what scholars and practitioners understand as 'community archaeology'. The seemingly simple question that the organisers posed refers both to the 'communities' and the 'archaeologies' concerned, and to the interrelations between them. Which communities are we addressing when doing community archaeology, and which are ignored? What approaches to archaeology do we employ? Does community archaeology end when the excavation season is over? How do we affect the community in which – and with whom – we work as archaeologists? How does the community affect us, the archaeologists? And how can we measure and explain success or failure of 'community archaeology' projects?

The premise of the conference was that these kinds of questions still require wider discussion and unpacking, not least within the contexts of both Middle Eastern archaeology and archaeology in the Nordic countries. The conference, held at the University of Helsinki, brought about diverse and stimulating discussions, bringing together researchers and practitioners from – and working in – these two ostensibly quite different regional settings (for a review of the conference itself, see Ahola 2020). The publications stemming from presentations of work carried out in the Middle East – including examples from Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Oman, and Palestine – will be presented later in another publication (Bonnie, Lorenzon & Thomas forthcoming), while several of the Nordic and British case studies are presented in this themed section of *Fennoscandia Archaeologica*.

Of the papers presented relating to the northern European context (primarily presenting case studies from Finland and the United Kingdom), three have developed into full papers forming this themed section. These are joined by a shorter note from Tiina Äikäs and Tiia Ikonen, and the present introductory paper.

Some of the themes that emerged during the conference have been discussed in recent literature (Kähler 2015; Tully & Allen 2017; Apaydin & Hassett 2019). This themed section aims at providing a fruitful and concrete reflection on the ways in which these themes applied to the Nordic and British contexts in particular, although many of the reflections of the authors are relevant more broadly. Our discussion pushed the boundaries beyond the theoretical definition of community archaeology to analyse the

concrete impact of current practices in the aforementioned areas. Thus, community and public archaeology is not just a theoretical framework of analysis, but rather an intrinsically grassroot movement, in which the main goal is for communities to reclaim agency over their heritage.

The papers here included achieve this goal by prompting a discussion on the definition on the word 'community' within community archaeology (Raike, Henttinen & Saunaluoma); critically evaluating archaeologists as a community in themselves (Moshenska); analysing three types of archaeologies employed in community archaeology (Aalto); and finally measuring the effectiveness of community archaeology as an active practice and engagement process (Äikäs & Ikonen).

In the current mordant political and social climate, where poignant debate about heritage, community engagement, and stakeholders' role in archaeology is intensifying, we believe it is essential to shift back the attention on local communities and center the discussion on how they are personally affected by the archaeological process, how these communities interact with the heritage and what kind of narrative it is built around heritage and archaeological material culture by professionals and local stakeholders.

Eeva Raike, Hanna Henttinen, and Sanna Saunaluoma present a case study of a community archaeology project carried out at the Pori Reposaari Takaranta rock carving site on the western coast of Finland. The site of their focus – containing rock carvings dating from the 19th century up until current times – evidently contains significant social and heritage values for the local community (cf. Díaz-Andreu 2017), despite not yet being designated as 'official' heritage by the national authorities. The project, funded by the Finnish Cultural Foundation (Fi. Suomen kulttuurirahasto) through their Dig it! funding stream (Fi. Mullankaivajat – literally 'dirt diggers'), targeted local schoolchildren, engaging them in frottage to document the carvings, and supplementing this with interviews with local elderly people. They highlight non-typical methodological approaches to community archaeology (where many so often centre around the activity of excavation - as in the discussions of Tully 2007 for example), as well as reminding us that places can have strong significance for communities even if they evade authorised heritage status (see Smith 2006 for a discussion of the so-called 'authorised heritage discourse').

In his article, Ilari Aalto reflects on community archaeology excavations in both urban and rural settings in Finland through a semi-structured survey among participants. Most community archaeology projects in Finland (and indeed elsewhere, see for example Woolverton 2016: 139 for discussion of typical locations of community excavations in Cambridgeshire) take place at rurally-located excavation sites. Aalto leads one of the few urban community archaeology excavations in Finland. Since 2017 they have been excavating on the terrain of the Aboa Vetus & Ars Nova Museum in Turku, investigating remnants of its medieval and post-medieval town. As part of this excavation, the museum initiated the project 'Get excited, engage, follow!' (Fi. Innostu, seuraa, sitoudu!) to bring the interested public into direct contact with the town's archaeology. Building upon the survey conducted among its participants and those from rural excavation projects, Aalto stresses certain advantages of urban public archaeology projects because of an ease of accessibility, both physically and mentally. While overall positive, the respondents also noted possible failures in the project, notably the importance of more detailed introductions on excavation and writing about archaeological finds. Most interesting is that the participants in Turku experienced a stronger relationship with the study area than those participants working on rural community archaeology projects. While Aalto deemed the reasons for this unclear, it is ultimately one reason for why more public archaeology projects in urban contexts should be conducted in Finland.

Gabriel Moshenska's contribution focuses on the role of protesters in public archaeology using case studies from the second half of the 20th century in the United Kingdom. Although public protests and controversy are no exception in archaeology, Moshenska reflects through individual and collective levels on the themes of these protests, including a poor understanding of community archaeology and the stakeholders' value in determining the future of the excavations. For example, it becomes clear through his case studies of the Temple of Mithras which

was excavated in London in 1954, the discovery of the Rose Theatre in Southwark in 1989 and the controversies around so-called 'Seahenge' in Norfolk in 1999, that the public perception of heritage management is that it should always lead to the protection and preservation of archaeological sites *in situ*, rejecting preservation by record (a typical professional archaeological approach) as unacceptable. Moshenska's critique contributes in creating a better disciplinary environment in which these protests can be faced with a better understanding by creating a more inclusive and transparent discipline.

The definitions of public or community archaeology are often debated, and in many cases left undefined, which can lead to confusion for both students, researchers and practitioners alike (Moshenska 2017: 5). Ilari Aalto discusses this challenge in his paper, and opts to utilise the term 'public archaeology' rather than 'community archaeology' as a 'more encompassing' label for his case study (see also Oldham 2017 for another discussion of models of public archaeology). Aalto's example from Turku, along with Raike, Henttinen, and Saunaluoma's example from outside of the city of Pori, both represent examples from the south of Finland. They are joined by a shorter note from Tiina Äikäs and Tiia Ikonen who briefly discuss a case study from the region around Oulu, to the north of the country, which engages schoolchildren with industrial heritage, as well as embarking upon an exciting Virtual Reality museum project. They share their experiences to date, in what is an ongoing project. We look forward to following their progress in the coming years.

As the Finnish authors in this themed section note, public or community archaeology is far from a new phenomenon in Finland, although it is perhaps not as well documented or as researched as it is in countries such as the United Kingdom. Should this be a call for more reflection on Finnish community archaeological practice within scholarly discourses? Certainly this is one of our aims, but also to highlight the successful case studies currently active and encourage new practices to flourish in the Nordic context.

Moshenska reminds us too in his paper, that even in countries such as England, in which public engagement is more common and perhaps more often critically assessed, there can still occur serious mis-steps in engaging with and navigating public understandings of the practice and goals of archaeology and archaeological heritage management. This suggests that far from 'solving' the challenge of public engagement with archaeology, there is always more to debate and analyse in identifying not only ways in which to interest the wider public, but also for understanding popular perceptions of archaeologists, archaeology and the past more generally. In this themed section we hope to have contributed to this ongoing and constantly-evolving debate, presenting some of the most recently community-applied scholarship in Finland as well as providing a more longitudinal reflection on public relationships with the past.

REFERENCES

Ahola, M. 2020. #Livearch2019 Living Communities and Their Archaeologies: From the Middle East to Nordic Countries, University of Helsinki, September 12–14, 2019. *Journal of Community Archaeology & Heritage* 7(1): 73–4.

Apaydin, V. & Hassett, B. 2019. Should I stay or should I go? Ideals and realities of archaeology in the conflict regions. *Journal of Community Archaeology & Heritage* 6(1): 36–50.

Bonnie, R., Lorenzon, M., & Thomas, S. (eds., forthcoming). *Living Communities and Their Archaeologies in the Middle East*. Helsinki: Helsinki University Press.

Díaz-Andreu, M. 2017. Heritage values and the public. *Journal of Community Archaeology & Heritage* 4(1): 2–6.

Kähler, A. 2015. Digging community archaeology. *Journal of Community Archaeology & Heritage 2*(1): 72–8.

Moshenska, G. 2017. Introduction: Public archaeology as practice and scholarship where archaeology meets the world. In G. Moshenska (ed.) *Key Concepts in Public Archaeology*: 1–13. London: UCL Press.

Oldham, M. 2017. Bridging the gap: Classification, theory and practice in public archaeology. *Public Archaeology* 16(3–4): 214–29.

Smith, L. 2006. *Uses of Heritage*. London: Routledge.
Tully, G. 2007. Community archaeology: General methods and standards of practice. *Public Archaeology* 6(3): 155–87.
Tully, G. & Allen, M. J. 2017. Participatory augering: A methodology for challenging perceptions of archaeology and landscape change. *Public Archaeology* 16(3–4): 191–213.
Woolverton, J. 2016. 'Becoming history ourselves': A study of age demographics in community archaeology societies. *Journal of Community Archaeology & Heritage* 3(2): 135–51.